

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Research ethics and research publications in institutions of higher learning in Uganda: A case of Southwestern Uganda

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**The study aimed to investigate the effect of research ethics on research publication among institutions of higher learning in southwestern Uganda. The study employed a cross-sectional research design. Because the study included quantitative and qualitative methods, it was able to examine the relationship between the variables under investigation. A sample of 285 respondents was selected using purposive sampling and simple random selection techniques. The quantitative and qualitative information from the respondents was analyzed using theme analysis and SPSS Version 23.0. Quantitative results were presented in tables as descriptive statistics, correlations, and regressions based on the study's aim. The study found that research publications are positively impacted by research publications ( $r = 0.862$ ,  $P0.01$ ). With these findings, the study contributes to the current heated discussion over the impact of research ethics limits on the success of research publications at institutions of higher learning in southwestern Uganda by providing actual data that has been largely lacking. If the study's recommendations are to be followed, institutions of higher learning in southwestern Uganda should work with the academic staff to put more emphasis on research ethics and research publications.**

**Key words:** Research ethics, research publications.

## INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions frequently incorporate research ethics into their publications (Bouchikhi and Kadiri, 2021). Nonetheless, there is a lack of

confidentiality and unintentional exploitation of respondents' assent, which is linked to plagiarism and considered academic dishonesty (Abbas et al., 2021).

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In the research community in particular, it is not uncommon to use someone else's concepts or works without properly citing them. Because of the lack of transparency and the decision to pass off someone else's work as one's own, failing to follow research ethics in academic publications is seen as unethical behaviour both locally and internationally. According to Rahizah et al. (2021). Local and foreign students attending universities in developed and developing countries are not well-versed in research ethics. Most universities in affluent countries have already implemented an academic ethics code of some kind (Burke and Sanney, 2018). Nonetheless, when research is published by instructors and students together, these rules may not always hold. In over 90% of higher education institutions in developed and developing countries, the most recent plagiarism detection systems, such as "Turnitin" and "Urkund" are available. These resources are utilized to review research papers and articles that are authored by instructors and students (Saini and Chaudhary, 2020). The goal of using such anti-plagiarism software is to lessen plagiarism, which will improve academic research and instruction at the university level. However, not much has changed; roughly 98% of people continue to act unethically. The majority of researches published in African countries are neither rigorous, intentional, controlled, nor grounded in empirical data. This violates consent, secrecy, and academic integrity and is unethical in all respects (Boutchich and Kadiri, 2021). Their divergent ideologies can be explained by their differing intellectual backgrounds as well as the pronounced cultural contrasts they experience when studying abroad in another country. Burke and Sanney (2018) suggest that for research papers to contribute to the corpus of knowledge for researchers worldwide, including postsecondary students, they must be purposeful, regulated, substantiated by evidence, and provide empirical data to support that aim. As a result, using respondents' consent should be acceptable, and plagiarism should be avoided. Budgetary restrictions that impact all parties involved in publishing research impede the bulk of research produced in Uganda (Davies, 2020). One of the main issues that has contributed to a rise in unethical practices in research and publications is the lack of money for instructors and students at universities and other educational institutions (Gabrielle et al., 2021). Plagiarism is pervasive in all academic contexts; respondents are no longer asked for their agreement, and anonymity is no longer assured. The quality of published studies is impacted by researchers at approximately 87% of Ugandan universities who obtain material from the internet, neglect to give acknowledgment to the authors, and falsify data (Saini and Chaudhary, 2020). If this problem is not resolved through collaboration with Uganda's National Council for Higher Education, research papers will lose relevance. Research ethics should be considered to ensure that any

knowledge published is useful (Espinoza et al., 2021). This study aimed to investigate the effect of research ethics on research publications in Ugandan higher education institutions: a case study in southwest Uganda.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The research ethics challenge in higher education was studied by Abbas et al. (2021). The study looked at the effects of internet access, ethical controls, and pedagogical factors on plagiarism among Pakistani students. This quantitative study investigated the extrinsic factors that contribute to plagiarism among Pakistani university students. An online survey was used to gather data from university students in Islamabad City. The survey asked questions about internet access, ethical control, teaching aspects, and student plagiarism. To gather data, the researchers employed a snowball sampling strategy. The relative effects of gender, programme level, field of study, enrollment status, mode of delivery, internet access, ethical controls, and teaching characteristics on the prediction of plagiarism were tested using a hierarchical regression analysis technique. The study's statistical analysis indicates that while internet access may be negatively associated with students' instances of plagiarism, ethical control and instructional elements appear to have a favorable correlation. These results suggest that personal and cultural variables are crucial in enforcing rules strictly and raising awareness of the significance of preventing plagiarism among students. The researcher did not, however, address how research ethics impact research publications, which is a gap in their work. A study on the influence of ethics on research productivity in higher education was carried out by Boutchich and Kadiri (2021). Evaluating the effect of ethics on research output at public university laboratories was the aim of the study. Neural networks are utilized to highlight affecting and influenced variable modalities in order to accomplish this goal. Results indicate that while publications and scientific projects are most impacted by ethics, ethics-supporting documents and transparency have the biggest effects on research output. Ultimately, this work's uniqueness resides in the way it reconciles two seemingly incompatible dimensions: productivity, which has an economic meaning, and ethics, which has a social one. It also involves using the neural network approach, which is not frequently applied in the social sciences. Nevertheless, the researcher did not present the results of research articles that did not follow ethical guidelines.

A study on ethics and social responsibility in higher education institutions was carried out by Espinoza et al. (2021). The theoretical examination of scientific information sources was the main aim of this study. An analysis of the longitudinal scientific literature pertaining to the ideas of ethics and social responsibility from 2017

**Table 1.** Target population and sample size in institutions of higher learning.

Respondents	Actual sample size	Data collection methods
Faculty deans	45	Interviews/Questionnaire
Heads of departments	56	Interviews/Questionnaire
Lecturers	180	Interviews/Questionnaire
Total	285	-

Source: Caritas Kabale Diocese (2024).

to 2021 was conducted for this purpose, proposing a definitional orientation that may be utilized during a pandemic. In contrast to the modifications that unite the various words obtained from the concepts of the study variables, the study was directed by new alternatives, trends, and current preferences as a result of the dynamic scenarios. A search of publications found in the Science Direct and Scopus databases served as the foundation for the methodology. The methodology used allowed for the integration of the research and follow-up, which aided in the acquisition of 498 publications. After applying eligibility criteria to the entire set of papers, 15 articles were deemed suitable for the study. The United States, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom were the nations from which the final pieces were sourced. The findings demonstrate the tight connection between social duty and ethics. The study concludes that there is a need for development in higher education institutions so that workers with strong morals and values can have a positive impact on society. However, the study did not discuss how research ethics affect research publishing.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research design

According to Bosco and Moses (2023), a study design is a predetermined framework for data collection and analysis. Davies (2020) describes it as a master plan that outlines the techniques and protocols for gathering and evaluating data. This study used quantitative and qualitative methods in a cross-sectional survey research design. The use of a quantitative approach aids in the description of the situation as it is and in determining the causes and effects of the variables under investigation. However, a qualitative method aids in gaining understanding and explores the richness, depth, and complexity of the subject being studied. The cross-sectional method was chosen because it exposes participants to real-world scenarios and demystifies difficult ideas. While the qualitative strategy provided the researcher with in-depth explanations on research ethics and publications in southwest Uganda, the quantitative technique aimed to quantify and establish the links.

### Study population and sample

The study population comprised 163 staff of Caritas Kabale Diocese in different departments such as Administration, and beneficiaries shown in Table 1.

### Quality control (validity and reliability)

#### Validity

The degree to which the results of data analysis are compatible with the phenomenon under study is known as validity. Through consultation with numerous organisations and project success specialists, the researcher developed the study techniques (Bedeian, 2019). Pre-testing the research tool makes it possible to identify and get rid of problems such as questions that are confusing or unclear, have too little space for answers, are packed, or have the wrong question number. After conferring with the four microfinance experts and having four judges assess the items for each instrument, the content validity index (CVI) was developed by dividing the percentage of valid items from each judge by the total number of items:

$$CVI = \frac{\text{Number of items rated relevant by expert}}{\text{Total number of items in the instrument}}$$

Summary of the reliability statistics:

$$\text{Judge 1} = 46/50 = 0.92$$

$$\text{Judge 2} = 42/50 = 0.84$$

$$\text{Judge 3} = 40/50 = 0.82$$

$$\text{Judge 4} = 45/50 = 0.88$$

$$\text{Therefore, } 0.92+0.84+0.82+0.88 = 3.46/4 = 0.87.$$

According to Kiconco et al., (2022) the average content validity index (CVI) number of certified validity divided by the total number of items must be at least 0.7 for instruments to be acknowledged as legitimate. The instruments were legitimate because the CVI value was greater than 89% (Amin, 2005). These findings suggested that the study tools employed to collect data on research ethics on research publications in southwestern Uganda were legitimate.

#### Reliability

When the same populations of people are regularly measured under the same conditions, reliability evaluations examine how consistently the measuring instruments provide results, according to Turyasingura and Agaba (2023). To verify the validity of the research instruments, a pilot study was conducted with participants who were selected at random from the target population. The questionnaire's question design, phrasing, clarity, and completeness were all requested to be reviewed by the respondents. The reliability of the instruments was further demonstrated using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient (Kiconco et al., 2022). The instruments are more precise and helpful, as seen by the results, which are 0.76 on a Statistic Package for Social Scientists (SPSS)

**Table 2.** Reliability statistics.

Variable	Cronbach's alpha	Number of items
Voluntary participation	0.88	25
Plagiarism	0.90	25
Informed consent	0.85	25
Research publications	0.87	25
Total	3.698	-
Average	3.5/4=0.88	-

Source: Field Data (2024).

**Table 3.** Summary of the responses.

Response	Agree		Undecided		Disagree	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
I have been participating voluntarily in data collection processes	198	68.5	00	00	87	31.6
I have been helping researchers in data collection	208	72.9	00	00	77	27.1
Data collected has been collected in good faith	203	71.2	00	00	82	28.7
Plagiarism has been restricted during data collection	205	71.9	00	00	80	28.1
Before going to the field for data collection, informed consent forms have been signed	169	59.3	29	10.2	87	31.6
Research publications have been done well	198	68.5	00	00	87	31.6
I need more skills in publications	285	100	00	00	00	00

Source: Field Data (2024)

scale (Table 2).

As a result, it can be concluded that there is a high level of confidence in the dependability of the entire scale if there is a significant degree of correlation between the individual components. Cronbach's alpha provides the following criteria: "> 0.5 - Poor, > 0.6 - Questionable, > 0.7 - Acceptable, > 0.8 - Excellent, and > 0.5 - Unacceptable".

### Data management and processing

The processes of data analysis descriptive, bivariate, and multivariate were completed. The descriptive analysis resulted in the creation of tables. The Pearson rank correlation was used in a bivariate study to compute the connections between independent variables and the dependent variable, as well as those between categorical factors. Again, cross tabulations were used to show how the variables related to one another.

### Multivariate analysis

Only independent variables that had demonstrated a significant correlation with the dependent variable at the bivariate stage of the model's creation were included at this point. Stated differently, only significant factors from the bivariate stage were regressed at the multivariate level. The following equation displays the multivariate model:

$$RP = \beta_0 + \beta_1 VP + \beta_2 P + \beta_3 IC + \varepsilon$$

where RP = research publication, SRB = voluntary participation, P = plagiarism, IC = informed consent,  $\varepsilon$  = error term, and  $\beta_1$ ,  $\beta_2$ , and

$\beta_3$  are the partial coefficients that explain how each of the independent variables (voluntary participation, plagiarism, and informed consent impact the research publication).

## RESULTS

### Descriptive statistics for research ethics and research publications in Southwestern Uganda

This study aimed to determine the effect of research ethics on research publications in southwestern Uganda. The information needed for this was gathered from secondary sources (documented work) and primary sources (personnel). A questionnaire with five scales, strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (UD), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD), was used (Table 3).

Table 4 shows that 68.5% of respondents said they have voluntarily participated in data collection procedures, whereas 31.6% disagreed. However, 72.9% of respondents agreed that they had been assisting researchers in gathering data, with 28.1% disagreeing. 71.2% of respondents agreed that the data had been gathered in good faith. Respondents noted that plagiarism has been restricted during data collection, with 71.9% agreeing and 31.6% disagreeing. Before entering the field to collect data, respondents were asked if they

**Table 4.** Correlation analysis for research ethics

Correlation		Research publications	Research Ethics
Research publication	Pearson Correlation	1	0.862**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	-	0.000
	N	285	285
Research Ethics	Pearson Correlation	0.862**	-
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000
	N	285	285

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).  
Source: Primary Data (2024).

**Table 5.** Model summary of research ethics and research publications.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.862 <sup>a</sup>	0.925	0.924	0.15216

Predictors: (Constant), research ethics and research publications.

had signed informed permission papers. 10.2% of respondents were unsure, with 59.3% of respondents agreeing with the statement and 31.6% disagreeing. When asked if research articles had been done well, 68.5% of respondents agreed with the assertion, while just 31.6% disagreed. When asked if they needed additional expertise for research publications, all respondents (100%) said yes. This suggests that study publishing is impacted by research ethics.

Seven statements were provided to survey respondents in an attempt to ascertain whether research ethics in institutions of higher learning in southwestern Uganda affected research publication. Since every respondent agreed with the statements used to evaluate these controls, it is possible to conclude that there are research ethics that affect research publications based on the nature of the responses and the descriptive statistics previously supplied. After the quantitative data analysis, key informant interviews yielded qualitative data, which underwent qualitative analyses. The qualitative outcomes of the research ethics are shown in the following: "Research ethics must be cultivated by all researchers in order to produce successful research publications. This will prevent all researchers from being biased" (Responses from respondents).

### Hypothesis testing

To enable the generalization of the results from the population samples, the study tested the proposed hypotheses. By using inferential statistics, this was

accomplished. To determine the existence, strength, and direction of any correlations between the independent and dependent variables, as well as to create a relationship model and test the two hypotheses, correlation and regression analyses were carried out.

The Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient was thus employed to ascertain the degree of the association in order to verify the alternative hypothesis, which states that research ethics has no bearing on study publication. The results are shown in Table 5.

This positive correlation between research ethics and research publication ( $r = 0.862^{**}$ ) is shown in Table 6. Based on these findings, a regression analysis was conducted to determine the extent to which research ethics restrictions affect research publications, or, to put it another way, the degree to which the variance in the independent variable would affect the dependent variable.

The coefficient of determination 0.862 implies that research ethics influence research publications. Thus, a significant positive significance means that the more the project budgetary control, the stronger the project success. Hence, budgetary planning contributes 86.4% to research publication; the rest are other factors.

The outcome once more showed a positive significant regression coefficient of 862 at the 0.01 significance level. The results show that, with a 95% confidence level and a beta value of 0.962, research ethics do have an impact on research publications. As a result, the researcher maintains the alternative hypothesis, which claims that "southwestern Ugandan higher education institutions' research publications are significantly

**Table 6.** Regression output summary on research ethics and research publications (Coefficients<sup>a</sup>).

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error			
(Constant)	0.385	0.134	-	2.882	0.005
Research ethics	0.921	0.030	0.862	30.953	0.000

Dependent variable: Research publication.  
Source: Field Data (2024).

impacted by research ethics."

## DISCUSSION

The initial aim of this study was to demonstrate how research ethics in southwestern Ugandan higher education institutions had a favorable influence on research papers that use descriptive statistics and qualitative analysis. The respondents agreed on the nine research ethics questionnaire components with an average rate of 90% and  $r = 862^{**}$ . This was further corroborated by the qualitative findings from the primary informants, which showed that research ethics have an effect on research publishing in higher education institutions in southwest Uganda.

## Conclusion

It is clear from the statistics and the discussion that research publications in Southwest Ugandan higher education institutions are strongly correlated with their policies regarding research ethics. This demonstrates how important it is for academic staff members to take part in the application of research ethics in order to produce high-caliber research publications.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

All higher education institutions should devise a plan to subject these publications to a plagiarism test prior to publication to guarantee that researchers completely adhere to research ethics. Additionally, data gathering instruments should be provided to the directorate of research and publishing. This will raise the research publication's caliber to an exceptional level.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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